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## Book Reviews.

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**Constructive Studies in the Life of Christ.** An Aid to Historical Study and a Condensed Commentary on the Gospels, for Use in Advanced Bible Classes. By ERNEST DEWITT BURTON AND SHAILER MATHEWS, Professors in the University of Chicago. Revised edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1901.

The book before us fills a long-felt want. The phrase is hackneyed, but the significance is great. What book can be of greater service to advanced Bible classes than a series of constructive studies in the life of Christ which shall place within easy reach the best of the new light historical scholarship is shedding on the subject-matter of the gospels without involving the student in the intricate mazes of analytical criticism? And is it any wonder that adult Bible classes decline, in spite of the vivid interest that surrounds the subject and increases in geometric ratio with the new light shed by critical investigation, when the student, roused to expectancy by the stir of life in dry fields, was met only with new and vaster accumulations of the old straw rethreshed after the manner of Lange's "Commentaries" and Peloubet's "Notes"?

Not that Professors Burton and Mathews have stepped beyond the limits of the "safest" conservatism. There are no assumptions in the field of criticism to shock even the most sensitive traditionalist. If the authors have views of their own not always confined to the limits of current orthodoxy, as some may have reason to think from other contributions, they have not permitted their work to be marred by taking the attitude of the advocate of special theories. What was aimed at was training in correct *method*; and the aim has been pursued without a moment's obscuration of the pedagogic principle that the starting-point must be that of the pupil, not of the teacher. Accordingly, that for which the "Blakeslee Lesson Leaves" and other more ephemeral attempts labored with sporadic success is here brought to such relative perfection as enables us to say: The advanced Bible class is at last equipped with a text-book which may make its studies something more than a parody of instruction in other branches of history and literature. Doubtless there will continue to be innumerable miniature

preaching services, evangelistic services, and prayer-meeting exhortations masquerading as Bible classes. Others will give a painful parody of the microscopic muck-raking of antiquated homiletical commentary. But henceforth there will not be the excuse that a text-book is lacking so simple that any intelligent layman may use it, yet not childish; genuinely scientific in method, yet neither dogmatically prejudiced against critical views nor capable of stumbling the weak or hypersensitive on the score of orthodoxy.

A feature especially worthy of commendation is the series of brief bibliographies appended to each of the nine parts, and occasionally elsewhere. Of course, the selection includes only English or translated works, and on the general subject only such as may be "recommended for the Sunday-school library," so that we are not disposed to look for Keim or Hausrath. We wonder rather that the comparatively superficial work on "Matthew" by Gloag, Dods, and Bruce, and by Reynolds on "John," should be recommended on p. 27, while the admirable work of Bartlet *s. v.* "Matthew" in the same volume of the Hastings *Dictionary* referred to on p. 66 should seem to be overlooked. Cheyne's *Encyclopædia Biblica*, the most scholarly, as well as most recent, authority on the subjects under discussion, is apparently excluded on the score of radicalism. Perhaps it might be as well to inform the student that a certain degree of supervision is exercised over his mental pabulum, lest he fall into the constant snare of the amateur—the notion that he "knows it all."

Another admirable feature is the frequent illustrations *by reproduction of photographs*. Engravings carry infinitely less conviction, because, so far as the reader can tell, they may be pure works of fancy. On this score even the great critical Old Testament edited by P. Haupt might profitably imitate our authors. Typography, maps, plans, and arrangement of material are all most creditable to the institution which thus makes itself serviceable to all students of the Bible.

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#### ARE THEY PRACTICABLE ?<sup>1</sup>

Is it not senseless to ask whether the soil in which a beautiful bloom has grown is suitable for such flowers? These studies came from Bible-school ground. Are other schools sufficiently like that in which these were successfully used to justify their adoption?

<sup>1</sup> The studies are being used in the Sunday school of the writer's church.

Practicability here considers three things: (1) the instrument, (2) the material on which it is to work, and (3) the hand that is to use it. Is the tool good in itself, is it adapted to the material, and is the workman able to use it correctly? The studies inherently are of surpassing value. We are now concerned with the scholar and the teacher.

Scholars vary only slightly in different Bible schools. Those able to read the gospels with ordinary intelligence, under the guidance of a competent teacher, would greatly profit by this book. We do not need to spend much time in thinking about the student. This judgment rests upon experience with these studies, and also upon experiment along other lines.

The most vital factor in any system is the teacher, from whom will come any criticisms of impracticability. Why? A missionary in Africa, when building his mud house, noticed that the clay was brought in bark on the heads of natives. To help the carriers he made some wheelbarrows, took one to the bank, filled it, and trundled it back to the site of his hut. This exemplary performance over, he sent his helpers off with the vehicles. After a reasonable time he heard the song of the coming procession. Every wheelbarrow was full, but was on the head of a native. Always grotesque is the obstinacy that uses new things in old ways. This is the fate which faces every fresh suggestion. The trouble is not in the instrument, nor in the material, but in the habits of the hand or the fossilization of the brain. Here will be found the only problem in the use of these studies.

The lazy teacher, or the one who tries to show how much he knows and incidentally reveals how little, or the one who is bound by the artificial methods so disastrously prevalent for a generation, will find these studies impracticable. The teacher who knows how to study, and, what is better, can get the scholar to study, will heartily welcome these aids to instruction. Limitation in their use will not be due to their impracticability, nor to the inability of the teacher, but to lack of disposition to employ them as designed.

Their elasticity is noticeable. They are adapted for both elementary and advanced study, for sketchy as well as detailed investigation. They are not like gloves, made to fit hands of certain sizes, but are more like a carefully prepared bill of fare from which either a delicate or a voracious appetite could be satisfied. Under proper guidance, any young person who legitimately belongs to an historical grade may use them with advantage. Adults should be able to use them independently with the best results.

Their essential companion is the *Harmony of the Gospels* on which they are constructed. The two volumes would supply all needed equipment for such a course on this subject as the ordinary Bible school offers. The library of the school should make accessible the books of reference noted. Not the least part of their practical value is that these studies acquaint the faithful student with correct methods of interpretation, and especially with processes essential to the proper study of biblical biographies. It is by these that the uniqueness of Christ's life is demonstrated. Uniqueness is discovered only in the effort to classify. The initial assumptions of other schemes here become the increasing convictions of the pupil. When practicability, with the single limitation as to the teacher noted above, is joined to such a result, we cannot think too highly of this new aid to schools that want the best instead of the good, to say nothing of systems which are lacking when tested by every principle of sane pedagogics.

At last we have a text-book on the life of Christ, for use in academies, colleges, universities, and training schools, which neatly fills a gap that has long tantalized those who yearned for something of the kind. There is no further excuse for the neglect of this study by these institutions. Students can now have a book which in authority, completeness, and pedagogical value easily ranks with the best in other spheres. Rare delight awaits those whose instructors in such matters are wise enough to introduce it into these schools.

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**The Life and Literature of the Ancient Hebrews.** By REV. LYMAN ABBOTT, D.D. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. Pp. xiii + 408. \$2.

This volume is the outgrowth of a course of lectures on the Old Testament delivered in Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, and before the Lowell Institute of Boston. All the various types of Hebrew literature are discussed in their historic relations, so that the volume is practically a brief and popular manual of introduction to the Old Testament. In it the author seeks to present to the educated Christian public the chief results of the scientific study of the Hebrew Scriptures. His standpoint is distinctly modern and liberal, but he does not belong to the extreme radical wing of higher critics. The decalogue and the Book of the Covenant he regards as Mosaic, as well as the traditional basis of many portions of the later legislation. For this reason he